

**Component Area Assessment Annual Report  
Oral Communication Component Area  
2014-2015 Academic Year**

Submitted by:  
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## Assessment Criteria

### Component Area Goals

After completing the oral communication general education experience, students will be able to:

1. **Recognize communication as a transactional process by:**
  - a. determining audience orientation toward a message
  - b. identifying the supporting material most relevant to the intended receivers
  - c. recognizing and adjusting to nonverbal feedback
2. **Demonstrate critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages by:**
  - a. identifying reasoning that links observations to conclusions
  - b. understanding the limitations of different types of evidence
  - c. differentiating between various types of supporting evidence
  - d. identifying weaknesses in reasoning
3. **Produce organized informative and persuasive messages by:**
  - a. demonstrating the ability to capture audience attention
  - b. stating a thesis and previewing oral remarks
  - c. using signposts and transitions to clarify the organization of a message
  - d. concluding with a summary of main ideas or arguments
4. **Demonstrate effective extemporaneous speaking skills by:**
  - a. maintaining eye contact with intended receivers
  - b. using gestures which complement the verbal message
  - c. using varied vocal cues in the oral delivery of a message

### Learning Outcomes

***Outcome 1:** Recognizing communication as a transactional process by a) determining audience orientation toward a message; b) identifying the supporting material most relevant to the intended receivers; and c) recognizing and adjusting to nonverbal feedback.*

This outcome is measured by students' preparation outlines and speech proposals, in which they describe their preparation activities. They discuss their audience analysis activities and relate that analysis to the selection of organizational patterns, arguments, and supporting material. The assessment criteria for examining sample speeches include a set of criteria, which focuses on audience adaptation as a basis for determining the competency of the speaker.

***Outcome 2:** Demonstrating critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages by a) identifying reasoning that links observations to conclusions; b) understanding the limitations of different types of evidence; c) differentiating between various types of supporting evidence; d) identifying weaknesses in reasoning.*

The focus on critical thinking in the course is reflected in all assignments, especially the preparation outlines, speeches, and self-analysis assignments. In addition, exam scores can be used to test students' understanding of evidence and reasoning. Using exam scores on selected test items allows us to account for the performance of every student in the class. Although exam scores do not reflect the specific critical thinking activities associated with student speeches, exam scores provide a practical measure.

***Outcome 3:*** *Producing organized informative and persuasive messages by a) demonstrating the ability to capture audience attention; b) stating a thesis and previewing oral remarks; c) using signposts and transitions to clarify the organization of a message; d) concluding with a summary of main ideas or arguments.*

The structural elements of speaking are evident in speech performances. To assess the basic competencies of students, video recordings of student persuasive speeches are collected. The assessment team examines each selected speech for these elements within the assessment framework detailed below.

***Outcome 4:*** *Demonstrating effective extemporaneous speaking skills by a) maintaining eye contact with intended receivers; b) using gestures which complement the verbal message; c) using varied vocal cues in the oral delivery of a message.*

Students' competency in maintaining eye contact, using gestures and employing vocal variety are directly observable in their speech performances. The assessment team focused on examining how well students were able to perform extemporaneous delivery.

## Method

### Sample

For the fall, spring, and summer semesters, a total of 719 persuasive speech videos were loaded to the Ensemble system. A priori power analysis and pragmatic time constraints resulted in a selected sample of 251 speech videos ( $\pm 5\%$ , 95% CI) for analysis. This is approximately 150 more speeches than have been reviewed in past assessments. Random sampling for the selection of speech videos was used, wherein the team selected every third speech video after an arbitrary starting point, selected via a random number generator. When the video was inaudible or corrupted, the team simply shifted to the next video and resumed with the pattern of selecting every third video. With this sampling method, a relatively even distribution between fall, spring, and summer terms was accomplished.

### Procedure

The assessment team consisted of the new basic course director, a long-time term instructor, and a graduate student. The team was created with a desire to have various perspectives represented within the assessment process. The team met during August 2015 to conduct the assessment. The first session focused on training. The team reviewed the instrument, discussed definitions and criteria, and practiced assessing speeches. The team then coded a separate sample and attained 95% agreement on the ratings detailed below.

The team then assessed each of the videos on an individual assessment sheet, together as a group. When unsure of how to assess an element of a speech, team members would have a brief discussion and reach consensus. The totals for each team member were loaded into Excel; the results of individual assessments were not significantly different. A score for each facet and the overall speech was then tabulated into a group score. Group scores are reported below.

### Measures

The National Communication Association's "Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Form" was used as the main assessment tool. This form operationalizes eight criteria of effective speaking competencies. The eight criteria call on speakers to: 1) choose and narrow topic appropriately for the audience & occasion; 2) communicate the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion; 3) provide appropriate supporting material based on the audience and occasion; 4) use an organizational pattern appropriate to the audience and occasion; 5) use language that is appropriate to the audience and occasion; 6) use vocal variety in rate, pitch, and intensity, to heighten and maintain interest; 7) use pronunciation, grammar, and articulation appropriate to the audience, and 8) use physical behaviors that support the verbal message.

The eight criteria were rated as unsatisfactory, satisfactory, or excellent. During the training meeting, the team discussed the assessment instrument and normed on definitions of unsatisfactory, satisfactory, and excellent. It was agreed that excellent translated to a speech that would earn an A on the facet being assessed. A satisfactory mark translated to a B-C grade on that facet. An unsatisfactory mark translated to a D-F on the speech facet.

## Results

Across the three raters, an average for each of the eight elements were calculated for each speech. An overall averaged total score for each speech across the three raters was also calculated. These scores were then analyzed in terms of the student learning outcomes associated with this course.

### Eight Assessment Criteria

The eight criteria were rated as: unsatisfactory (1), satisfactory (2), or excellent (3). Average ratings across the three coders were calculated. No criteria had an average rating that approached excellent. The criteria that had an average rating of satisfactory were: topic selection (M= 2.13, SD= .56); use of language appropriate to the audience (M= 2.03, SD= .29); pronunciation, grammar, and articulation (M=2.06, SD= .28); and physical behaviors (M=2.60, SD= .64). The criteria with average ratings that fell below satisfactory were: thesis/specific purpose (M= 1.94, SD = .65); supporting material (M= 1.81, SD= .62); organizational pattern (M= 1.79, SD= .56); and vocal variety, pitch, and intensity (M= 1.91, SD= .48).

### Overall Ratings for Speeches

An overall summated rating for the speech was calculated based on scores for each of the eight criteria. The score given by each rater was then averaged. Scores could range between 8 and 24. A previously established minimum score of 16/24 was determined as minimally competent. Average summated ratings ranged from 9.66 to 24.00, with an average summated score 15.40 (SD= 2.74). Overall, 98 of the 251 speeches sampled scored over 16. This translates to 39% of the speeches passing the benchmark.

### Assessment of Learning Objectives

*Recognize public speaking as transactional.* Criteria detailed in the “Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Form” were used to evaluate benchmarks on student learning outcomes. The first learning outcome for students is to recognize public speaking as a transactional process. This course outcome has been assessed with the average score on criteria 2-8. The expectation is a minimum benchmark score of 14.00. The speeches sampled score slightly better than the minimal expectation (M= 14.14, SD= 2.53). Overall 126/251 speeches scored above a 14.00, which means approximately 50% of speeches met this course outcome.

*Demonstrate critical thinking.* The second learning outcome is to demonstrate critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages. This course outcome has been assessed with the average score on critical thinking exam questions. The benchmark set for this outcome is 75% correct responses on average. Unfortunately, data from the fall semester was not available. For the spring semester, four questions from the final exam were identified as testing critical thinking. These multiple-choice questions included an item about identifying a type of logical fallacy, understanding the reasoning process, representative examples as pieces of evidence, and analyzing the rhetorical situation. Thirty-one percent of the students answered the question about logical fallacies correctly. Forty-five percent of students answered the question

about the reasoning process correctly. Sixty-two percent of students answered the question about representative examples correctly. Finally, sixty-eight percent of students answered the rhetorical situation analysis question correctly. Taking the average correct response percentages for the four questions, 51% of students answered the critical thinking multiple-choice exam questions correctly.

*Produce organized messages.* The third learning outcome is to produce organized and informative persuasive messages. This course outcome has been assessed with the average score on all the assessment criteria. As previously reported the minimum benchmark is a score of 16.00. The average summated score for this year's sample was 15.40 ( $SD= 2.74$ ). Overall, 98 of the 251 speeches sampled scored over 16. This translates to 39% of the speeches passing the benchmark.

*Demonstrate effective extemporaneous speaking skills.* The fourth learning outcome is to demonstrate effective extemporaneous speaking skills. The outcome has been assessed with the average score on criteria 6-8. The expectation is a minimum benchmark score of 6.00. Scores can range from 3.00 to 9.00. This year's speeches averaged a score slightly better than the minimal benchmark ( $M= 6.57$ ,  $SD= 1.17$ ). Overall, 74% of the speeches passed the benchmark.

*BOT Initiative 2.* The assessment procedures described in this report are consistent with BOT Initiative 2. In particular, a randomly selected sample of student work in the oral communication component of the general education curriculum is reviewed to determine the level of competency in both oral communication and critical thinking. This year 39% of student speeches reviewed met the minimum standard for competency in the course, 61% failed to meet the standard.

## Discussion

It is important to note that a new system for assessment was introduced this year. The assessment team was trained and instructed to be rigorous in their assessment of the persuasive speeches. The changes were made to better examine the objectives and provide more conservative estimations for hitting the desired benchmarks.

Results demonstrate that four of the criteria for assessing the speeches were satisfactory. Students were, on average, able to select an appropriate topic; use appropriate language; be articulate; and use appropriate physical behaviors. That said, these criteria all show room for improvement. The criteria that were unsatisfactory included: thesis/specific purpose statements, supporting material, organizational patterns, and vocal variety. Overall, the majority of the speeches (61%) did not meet the minimum benchmark score.

These criteria were also used to assess successful completion of the learning outcomes. In this sample, approximately 50% of the students met the first learning objective of recognizing public speaking as a transactional process. Overall, 52% percent were able to correctly answer multiple-choice exam questions meant to assess their ability to demonstrate critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages. About 39% of students were able to meet learning objective three by producing organized persuasive messages. Finally, 74% percent of students met the minimum benchmark for demonstrating extemporaneous speaking skills.

## Action Plan

The assessment results show that significant improvements are needed in a variety of areas. Some steps have already been taken to improve our ability to meet criteria and learning outcomes.

First, all assignments for the course were redesigned. New guidelines and specific rubrics are now included for each speech. The workbook was completely revamped to include new materials, activities to practice each element of speech preparation, and more examples for each speech element. Additionally, the in-class examinations were replaced with online quizzes. The move to online quizzes creates approximately 150 more minutes of in-class instruction time to workshop with students on their speeches.

To help students determine more appropriate and narrow topics for speeches (Criterion 1), the course now features a civic thinking component. Students are asked to find civic problems of interest as a semester topic. They first present an informative speech on the problem and then craft an argument for a potential solution to the problem for the persuasive speech.

To improve the quality of thesis statements (Criterion 2), a variety of approaches have been taken. Additional supplementary materials on crafting thesis statements is now included in the workbook and instructors have been instructed to dedicate one class period to discussing each student's thesis statement in class. Two assignments before the speech now ask for the thesis statement so the instructor can assess its quality and provide timely feedback to students.

To improve the quality of the supporting material (Criterion 3), we are trying a variety of new additions. First, both major speeches now require five oral citations from high quality sources. Students practice creating these oral citations with a proposal and then place them in the speech by crafting a preparation outline. Students are then expected to include the five oral citations within their speech. We also worked with our research librarian, Sabrina Thomas, to develop a research guide for CMM 103, which provides guidance for finding sources and information literacy. Ms. Thomas also hosted a session for CMM 103 instructors on teaching information literacy.

To improve the organization of speeches (Criterion 4), students are now provided with detailed outline templates. The rubrics now allocate more points on organizational elements and insist on transitions throughout the speech. Class activities focusing on organization have also been added as options for instructors. To improve language choices (Criterion 5), a new class activity on language choices was designed for instructors. Points on the persuasive speech are now allocated for “argumentativeness” that is operationalized as language choice and tone.

We are still exploring ways to improve delivery. Currently delivery is assessed through: vocal variety in rate, pitch, and intensity (Criterion 6); pronunciation, grammar, and articulation (Criterion 7); and physical behaviors that support the verbal message (Criterion 8). Instructors have been asked to spend more class time working with students on delivery. New exercises to improve delivery have been added to the class repository. Motivation to practice delivery needs to be increased. We are currently considering an online platform called MindTap from Cengage that has a tool that allows for easy recording of students practicing their speech. Perhaps adding a tool that promotes practice and reinforcing that behavior will be able to create meaningful improvement.

A few general steps have also been taken to improve our delivery of the course. First, an instructor section was created on Blackboard. This instructor space creates an opportunity to share information like lesson plans, video examples, and activities. We are creating a repository for best practices and central mechanism for information dissemination. Frequent announcements are sent through the system to keep instructors aware of resources and opportunities to improve their class. Classroom observations of all first-year graduate students are being conducted both semesters; this practice will expand to all graduate students next year. Finally, we are examining a new textbook with online platform to “flip the classroom.” This potential change would allow more infrastructure and more support for instructors, especially new graduate teaching instructors. It would also create more time in class to work with students on speech construction and delivery.

### **Assistance Needed**

Continued funding for reviewers to conduct the assessment in summer is necessary.



*Summary Table*

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Method of Assessment</b>	<b>Standard</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>	<b>Action Plan</b>
1. Recognize public speaking as a transactional process	Global assessment on 7 of 8 review criteria	Minimum score of 14 on the 7 relevant criteria	50% of speeches passed	Revised speech assignments stress importance of assessment criteria.
2. Demonstrate critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages	Review of exam scores on items related to critical thinking	Average score: 75%	Average score: 51%	New class activities and revised speech assignments stress critical thinking application. Exploring new measure that better assesses critical thinking skills.
3. Produce organized informative and persuasive messages	Review of sample student speeches for minimal competence	Satisfactory performance on 8 evaluation criteria (average score = 16)	39% of speeches passed.	Outline templates now provided for students. Revised assignments ask for organizational plan.
4. Demonstrate effective extemporaneous speaking skills	Review of sample student speeches for minimal competence	Satisfactory performance on 3 evaluation criteria (average score = 6)	74% of speeches passed.	More class time and new classroom activities dedicated to improving delivery.